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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BRATISLAVA 000215

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SUBJECT: DISTURBING INCIDENTS PROMPT COMPARISONS TO
MECIAR-ERA TACTICS

Classified By: Keith Eddins, CDA, a.i., for reasons 1.4 b and d

11. (C) An alleged attempted poisoning of a judge's wife, repeated unlawful entries into the offices of Slovakia's premier watchdog NGO, and an 80-man strong police action against a Franciscan monastery led by a priest who was outspoken in his support for opposition presidential candidate Iveta Radicova, have raised concerns among the human rights and diplomatic community in Bratislava. Charge will meet on May 19 with the UK Ambassador and other diplomats to discuss these issues, as well as broader questions related to rule of law in Slovakia.

Alleged Threats Against Constitutional Court Judge

12. (SBU) On May 14, media reports surfaced that the wife of Constitutional Court Judge Laco Orosz had been hospitalized in what informed sources say was an attempted poisoning (she has recovered). Subsequently Judge Orosz reportedly received a call from an unknown male confirming the attempted poisoning, and then asking if he still planned to vote in favor of the Special Court. This was clearly a reference to the May 20 Constitutional Court ruling on the constitutionality of the Special Court against Corruption. pursuant to a complaint filed by a group of MPs, mainly members of Vladimir Meciar's party, HZDS. The action was taken after HZDS nominee Justice Minister Harabin's more direct attempts to get rid of the court were unsuccessful. Informed sources indicate that the anti-Special Court faction now has the votes needed to declare it unconstitutional. Although Judge Orosz has refused to comment publicly, we can confirm that he has been assigned a special protective detail. Given what we have heard about how important the closure of the Special Court is to Meciar and his supporters, it does not surprise us that such brutal tactics have been deployed.

Break-in at Fair-Play Alliance

13. (C) In a separate development, Zuzana Wienk informed us May 15 that the office of the NGO she heads, Fair-Play Alliance, a well-known watchdog group that was very active in uncovering the recent "bulletin board" tender scandal, had been broken into under suspicious circumstances. (Note: the "bulletin board" tender was found to have violated Slovak and EU regulations and has led to the sacking of the Minister involved.) According to Wienk, she and her colleagues had noticed on several occasions that the door to the office was unlocked when they arrived in the morning, despite the fact that they had locked it the previous evening. They changed the lock, but this continued to occur. Recently, the NGO moved its office. A few weeks ago, the new office was broken into and a nominal amount of cash was stolen. Wienk said that the fact that several more valuable items, such as

laptops, were not taken, suggested to her that the intent of the unlawful entry was to send a signal to the NGO. Police are investigating, but she doesn't expect the culprits to be found. (Note: Fair-Play Alliance filed suit against the government on May 13, asking it to ensure that the monies already paid out pursuant to the illegal tender "bulletin board" tender are returned to the state treasury. Fair-Play has asked the General Prosecutor to join the NGO in this suit, but has received no response.)

Raid On Monastery

14. (C) In yet another incident, at 6:00 am on May 12, 80 police officers raided the premises of Bratislava's Franciscan monastery. The police said they had come to arrest 3 priests who have been accused by two boys of sexual abuse. The police seized all computers, USB devices and most cellphones, including those belonging to the head of the monastery, Jan Krstitel Balasz (he is not charged). During the recent Presidential election, Balasz was one of several priests who expressed his personal views about the Presidential candidates. In a widely-circulated email, he outlined why he supported Iveta Radicova, the opposition candidate, as opposed to incumbent President Gasparovic. We understand that this email came to the attention of the Presidential office and led to direct expressions of concern from the President to higher-ups in the Catholic hierarchy. Balasz told us that the story of the boys was not credible for a number of reasons. Moreover, he said that he had received a call from the boys' mother after the raid,

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apologizing to him and in which she told him that the police had forced her to make the statement alleging sexual abuse. Balasz has a recording of this call. The police investigation is unfolding, and, so far, there has been no mention of the incident in the press. We cannot say whether Balasz's support for Radicova and the raid are linked, but his assertions raise concerns about the police action.

Comment

15. (C) The coincidence in timing of these three incidents has cast them in stark relief. While crony capitalism and corruption have marked, to a certain extent, all of Slovakia's post-independence governments, what set the Meciar era apart was his willingness to use intimidation and outright violence against anyone he perceived to be an opponent. While do not believe that Slovakia in 2009 is comparable to Slovakia of the mid-1990's, we will be watching these and other developments -- including the stalled investigation against the Kosice police officers charged with abusing Roma boys -- closely. The UK Ambassador has organized a May 19 meeting of like-minded embassies to discuss rule of law and corruption issues, at which we anticipate these incidents will be raised.

EDDINS